

**United States Department Of The Interior  
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To: All BC, HR, NI, SNPIT, RS, and WO Field BIA Liaison Office Employees

From: Director, National Human Resources Management Center

Subject: Guidelines on Religious Freedom in the Federal Workplace

The White House recently released the President's Guidelines on Religious Freedom in the Federal Workplace. The purpose of the guidelines is three fold: to inform federal employees that they may engage in personal religious expression to the greatest extent possible; clarify that federal employers may not discriminate in employment on the basis of religion; and to clarify that government agencies must reasonably accommodate employee's religious practices. The following information is provided to better explain the intent and scope of the new guidelines.

A. Religious Expression. As a general rule, employee's should be permitted to engage in private religious and non-religious expressions in personal work areas that are not regularly open to the public, subject to reasonable content and as long as employees do not attempt to pressure their own beliefs on other employees. Such religious expression must be permitted so long as it does not interfere with the agency's ability to carry out its official responsibilities. Agencies are not required to permit employee's to pursue or engage in personal religious or ideological campaigns during work hours.

B. Religious Discrimination. Federal agencies may not discriminate against employees in terms of hiring/refusing to hire; promoting/refusing to promote; or demonstrating any other form of favor/disfavor toward an employee or potential employee, based upon their religion, religious beliefs, or views concerning religion.

1. Supervisors are cautioned against coercing, or giving the appearance of coercing employees to participate, or not to participate in religious activities as a condition of continued employment, promotion, or other favorable action.

C. Accommodation of Religious Practices. Federal law requires an agency to accommodate employee's exercise of religious practices unless the accommodation would impose undue hardship on performing the agency's mission. Although an agency is not required to make an accommodation in excess of de minimis cost, the cost or the hardship must be real and not hypothetical. Accommodations must be made unless it would cause an unreasonable cost or disruption to the agency or to other employees, or if it is prohibited by law. In addition, religious accommodations may not be denied if the agency regularly permits similar accommodation(s) for other non-religious activities.

Questions regarding this guidance should be directed to Jerry Jones, Employee Relations Specialist, at 236-6690.

Signed  
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